

Fort Collins Coloradoan 1A
April 19, 2004

Musgrave supports importing medicines

Bill would allow FDA-approved drugs from Canada, abroad

By **MATTHEW BENSON**

MattBenson@coloradoan.com

With the price of prescription drugs on the rise, many seniors are looking outside the United States for cheaper alternatives.

That makes them criminals, technically speaking, because state and federal law makes it illegal to bring drugs — even of the legal, prescription variety — across the border.

U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, a Fort Morgan Republican, is supporting a bill that would change that.



MUSGRAVE

The measure would allow Americans to purchase prescription drugs from Canada, Europe and other sources abroad, so long as the drugs have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and come from an FDA-approved facility.

Proponents assert that having a closed market for pharmaceuticals has driven up prices, forcing American consumers to pay 30 percent to 300 percent more for the medications than residents of European or other industrialized nations.

"I'm fortunate enough that I have a good health-care plan, but there are plenty out there who don't and need help," said Fort Collins resident Stan Ulrich, 78.

One in eight seniors reported having trouble paying for prescriptions, according to a recent survey by the AARP. The advocacy group for those older than 50 supports the prescription bill.

Opening the pharmaceutical market could save American consumers at least \$635 billion each year, according to a congressional estimate.

"From what I hear from seniors," Musgrave said, "they are overwhelmingly in support of drug re-importation" — the term used for the practice of purchasing prescription drugs from outside the United States.

But the measure — sponsored by

See **MEDICINES**/Page A2

Medicines

A2, NATION, The Coloradoan, Monday, April 19, 2004,

Continued from Page A1

Rep. Gil Gutknecht, R-Minn. — is vehemently opposed by pharmaceutical companies, as well as the FDA, some congressional leaders and the Bush administration.

Critics note that many developed countries keep their drug prices artificially low with price controls. Canada, for example, can sell prescriptions for less because the government negotiates with manufacturers to set the price.

The United States has long eschewed such practices.

While Musgrave acknowledges Americans pay more for their access to the best and latest drugs, she said others should share in that cost burden.

"I think there is something wrong when Americans are the only ones being asked to pay the research and development and marketing for these drug companies," she said. "What's wrong with this picture when people are crossing the border to buy prescription drugs, and Canadians are coming to America for health care?"

Critics of Gutknecht's plan warn that opening the nation's borders to prescription-drug sales could lead to safety problems such as counterfeiting.

Since 1998, the FDA has opened 73 investigations into counterfeit or tampered drugs, according to the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association.

"Exposing Americans to potentially unsafe medicines is no way to address the issue of health-care affordability," the group states on its Web site.

Musgrave discounted that argument. The proposal requires that imported prescription drugs be packaged and shipped using counterfeit-resistant technologies similar to those used to secure U.S. currency.

Besides, she said, many drugs purchased in this country already are manufactured overseas. For example: Lipitor, a popular cholesterol-lowering medication, is made in Ireland.

Ulrich also is skeptical of the pharmaceutical companies' claims.

"If they're the same drugs we

have here and they have safety recalls, what's the difference?" he said.

Musgrave said she's optimistic about Gutknecht's proposal, which is "gaining support on both sides of the aisle."

The measure passed the House as part of the sweeping Medicare bill but was subsequently stripped off. Musgrave said she expects the prescription-drug proposal to reappear in the Senate.